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ABSTRACT

The educational attainment of college athletes has become a major national concern. Universities often have student athletes who are marginally prepared. Because universities accept these marginally prepared student athletes, it seems reasonable that they should provide special services necessary to reduce academic deficiencies. Raising academic entrance standards to eliminate student athletes with academic deficiencies is no solution. An alternative is for universities to provide marginally prepared student athletes with special services. Documentation of special educational support programs for student athletes needs to appear in the literature. Without documentation, professionals have no models to use when developing their own programs or when implementing special program components. Issues related to each institution's educational support service and to each institution's own uniqueness need to be reported. Reports by professionals who work at institutions of varying size may lead to the development of a model that could serve as the foundation for most educational support programs for student athletes. (NB)

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ACADEMICS AND AN ATHLETE:

RELATED ISSUES

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Academics and an Athlete

by

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It is redundant to note that the educational attainment of college athletes has become a major national concern. Purdy, Eitzel, and Hufnagel (1982) have documented from a socioeducational perspective the problem of the student-athlete. After comparing ten years of data regarding college athletes and the general college student population, these authors conclude that the educational value of college athletic participation is negative rather than positive. The reality for individuals who work with student-athletes from an academic or student services perspective is that they are confronted daily with people who are underprepared, unlikely to graduate, priority skewed, and manipulated by the demands of their sport.

The result of recent demands for accountability from the public as well as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has stimulated universities to begin placing an emphasis on assisting student-athletes in the areas of academics and student development. Universities such as Nebraska and Georgetown have recently received widespread publicity by hiring special personnel to assist their student-athletes academically. Ender (1983) outlined an eight-stage process for assisting high academic risk athletes. He framed the process within the context of student development and presented it as a possible model for academic advisors who work with small populations.

Solutions are generally prescriptive for dealing with student-athletes who are marginally prepared. For example, the NCAA has recently increased the academic requirements for first year intercollegiate

participation for freshman student-athletes (NCAA, 1983). Increasing or raising requirements is no solution; it merely changes the standards and allows another group of student-athletes to be defined as marginally prepared. Many universities have arranged for tutors and special counselors for student-athletes, while others may be developing, or already have developed, their own special program. A search of the literature has revealed no reports of an academic support program for student-athletes that could be utilized as a generic model for various size universities. Descriptions of academic support programs for this population need to be documented so that individuals who work with student-athletes can readily identify problem areas and apply appropriate measures for resolution in their own milieus. Without documentation, universities have no models or knowledge of issues unique to a specific institution to use as guidelines when developing their own programs.

SALIENT ISSUES

A number of issues surface for universities who have student-athletes that are marginally prepared. One issue is the question of where the responsibility lies when educational deficiencies exist. It is easy to start faulting, or placing blame, or looking for causes. These responses serve no immediate useful prupose. Instead, it is important to look at what can be done. Because universities accept student-athletes who are marginally prepared, it seems reasonable that they provide the special services which are necessary to reduce academic deficiencies -- in spite of casualties.

Raising academic entrance standards to eliminate student-athletes who have an academic deficiency seems to be a reasonable solution (Ervin, Saunders, & Gillis, 1984). However, this is no solution. Universities will always have a group of student-athletes who are

marginally prepared, regardless of how high or low academic entrance standards are set. Also, raising academic entrance standards for student-athletes above those of other entering students may be discrimination (Williams, 1983). Therefore, when universities actively recruit marginal students they have an obligation to those students. The obligation is to provide the services which are needed so these students have the opportunity to succeed academically. Thus the questions become, "What should a university's policy be when determining academic entrance standards for student-athletes, and what, if any, special educational services should be provided?" Many people feel scholarship athletes receive preferential treatment from universities in the form of free or substantially reduced living and academic expenses. The question of propriety may be raised. Should institutions be granting additional special services to a population that many people feel are getting more than their fair share? Can an argument be made that universities have already given athletes too much and that the burden of responsibility for obtaining additional special services falls on those athletes in need and not on the university? An alternative is to provide those athletes in need with additional special services.

If universities decide to provide student-athletes with special services, the question of how to deliver those services best arises. Should a special unit be developed to comprehensively serve the student-athlete? For example, should counselors, tutors, and specialists be hired to work with athletes? Or, should universities link individual student-athletes with existing campus resources -- realizing that some providers may not empathize with the athletes' unique circumstances (Zingg, 1982)?

Student services personnel who provide a service to student-athletes can become involved in a controversy that leaves them open to

attack; namely, should the service provider be interested in helping student-athletes achieve their maximum academic potential so they can become more functional and benefit society? Or, is the provider only interested in helping student-athletes remain eligible so the institution can reap the financial rewards which are a byproduct of their talents? One position is that institutions should be interested in both, because the individual is both. The rationale is simple. If student-athletes do not maintain their eligibility, they lose their scholarship. If the scholarship is lost, in most instances, the student-athlete will drop out of school. When out of school, the university is no longer in a position to provide the needed services in order to assist the individual in becoming a more functional person. A goal of any educational support service should be to help student-athletes make the transition to college life and to progress as far as they possibly can toward a four-year degree while on scholarship. Faced with the constraints of participating in intercollegiate sports (Rhatigan, 1984), the student-athletes' task of earning a four-year degree during the life of their scholarship is difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At this point in time, definitive guidelines for program development have not been resolved. However, there are educational areas and services which need to be included in academic programs for student-athletes. The following recommendations are based on the authors' work with student-athletes.

- teach time and environmental management.
- Provide traditional study skills instruction.

- Identify and provide information regarding various university resources and the processes of utilizing them.
- Furnish information and instruction about how to use the university's academic literature.
- Provide counseling for academic or personal concerns (Hurley, 1984).
- Assist in prediagnosis of possible learning disabilities or interferences.
- Link the marginally prepared student-athlete with the appropriate university developmental and remedial programs (Early, 1984).
- Provide program participants with liaison services.

SUMMARY

Documentation of special educational support programs for student-athletes needs to appear in the literature. Without documentation, professionals have no models to use when developing their own programs or when implementing special program components. Issues related to each institution's educational support service and to each institution's own uniqueness need to be reported. Reports by professionals who work at institutions of varying size may lead to the development of a model that could serve as the foundation for most educational support programs for student-athletes.

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